

## THE COMMITTEE FOR AID TO THE HOLY LANDS

*Chairman, His Eminence, the Most Reverend John,  
Archbishop of Western America and San Francisco,  
Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia*

The Russian Orthodox Holy Places  
in the Holy Land and on Mt. Athos,  
and the religious communities there,  
are at present in extremely difficult  
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of Orthodox believers who are  
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The Committee supplies information  
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contributions to be sent for the support  
of the Holy Places as well as  
for those living there.

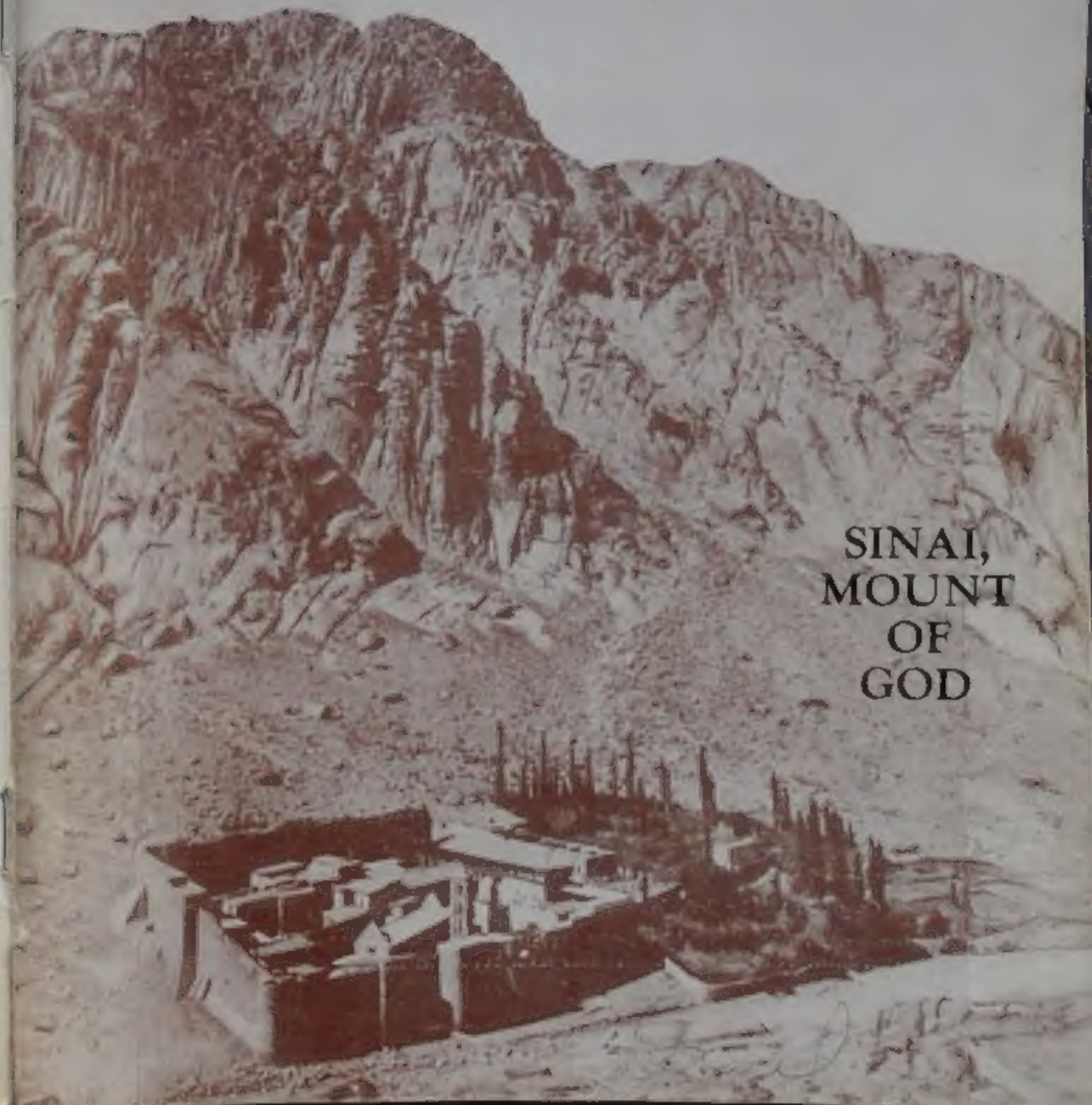
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# THE ORTHODOX WORD

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SINAI,  
MOUNT  
OF  
GOD





## THE ORTHODOX WORD

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## "GOD IS THE LORD, AND HAS REVEALED HIMSELF TO US"

*"With fear of God and faith approach ye to the life-giving Mysteries of Christ. In those sacred moments let be hushed within us all other thoughts, let be banished from our souls all other feelings, besides those unto which the Holy Church would elevate our spirits. Let us draw near with fear of God, faith and love, that we may be partakers of the life eternal."*

"That we may inspire within us that sacred fear, let us consider: Where are we now? Before whom do we stand? Unto what do we approach? Where are we? *Moses, Moses*, called God to His selected leader of Israel, *"draw not nigh hither; put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground."* Since the place unto which God once descended has become sanctified, and to which the man who was called the friend of God could not approach without care, then how much holier is the place which is sanctified by such often repeated descensions of the Holy Spirit at the consecration of the terrible mysteries upon which even angels look with fear.

"Before whom do we stand? It is the God of unapproachable glory, from whose presence it was once that Mt. Sinai blazed and trembled; the God Almighty, Who spoke and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast; that which is not, He names a thing existing; He makes to die and He makes to live; He lowers into hell and raises up again, the Lord All-Holy, a jealous God, the God All-Righteous... It is true that God appears to us here in His body and blood, without external grandeur and glory, without terrible manifestations; for, were it otherwise, we would say as the Israelites had said: *Let not God speak with us, lest we die."*

*Archimandrite Sebastian Dabovich  
("Sermon for Holy Communion")*

The glory of God, to which every Orthodox Christian approaches in Holy Communion, is for us the call to personal spiritual transfiguration. To this glory and this transfiguration the present issue of *The Orthodox Word* is devoted.





*The summit of the Mount of God, seen from the plateau where God appeared to the Prophet Elijah, the lone cypress being said to mark the exact spot. The chapel at right stands before the Prophet's cave. In Orthodox iconography this cave has been identified with the cave where the Prophet was fed by a raven (see p. 125).*

*At left, the Prophet Moses.*

## SINAI THE MOUNT OF GOD

*Made famous in recent years by the investigations of archeologists, philologists, and historians of art, the Greek Monastery of St. Catherine at the base of Mt. Sinai is more properly studied in its full Orthodox context. The following article is an attempt to describe briefly the Orthodox history and meaning of the monastery and the saints and holy places connected with it, the center of all being the Mount of God itself.*

**N**ear the southern apex of the triangular peninsula that separates Africa and Asia in the north lies the peak which Orthodox tradition identifies as the Mount of God: Sinai, or Horeb, as it is also called. Although it is so near the Red Sea that from neighboring peaks both arms of that Sea are plainly visible, it is situated in the midst of a mountainous desert whose desolation and dangers have struck with awe the pilgrims of sixteen centuries.

The southern part of the Sinai Peninsula is a desert of a special kind. Here there are no dunes, and very little sand. The intricate mountainous landscape is pierced by narrow rocky valleys, with an occasional gravelly plain such as that which adjoins Mt. Sinai, where the tribes of Israel camped before the Mount. There are few streams, and vegetation is sparse except around the few springs and pools which are true oases for the inhabitants. There are no settled towns in the desert; the only permanent inhabitants, besides the monks of St. Catherine's Monastery, are nomadic Bedouins.

Yet the same conditions which have rendered the desert of Sinai inaccessible to the civilized world, have made it a refuge for those fleeing that world. No traveller but has noted the extraordinary impression produced by the unique atmosphere of Sinai. The extreme dryness and clarity of the air, the abruptness of the terrain whereby even a small mountain becomes immensely impressive, rising straight up from a plain



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or a narrow canyon, and above all the solitude and absolute stillness -- invariably produce an invigorating effect on travellers, and inspire to wonder and contemplation. It is not surprising, then, that the Sinai desert became, in the first Christian centuries, one of the great centers of the anchoretic movement, when thousands of Christians fled to the desert and worked out their salvation in solitary caves and small communities.

It is long before this time, however, that Sinai is first known to sacred history. It was in this desert that Moses and the Chosen People wandered for forty years after leaving Egypt and before reaching the Promised Land; and it was in the heart of this desert, on the holy mount of Sinai, that God Himself came down and gave the Commandments of the Law.

It was here, too, at the base of the Mount, that God first spoke to Moses, appearing to him in flaming fire out of a bush that was not consumed, and saying, *Loose thy sandals from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground*. At this Moses turned away his face, for he was afraid to gaze at God (Exodus 3: 1-6). To this day, in the chapel built on this spot by the Empress St. Helena in the fourth century and now located behind the altar of the basilica at St. Catherine's Monastery, every visitor is required to remove his shoes before entering. Outside the chapel grows a bush which is said to be a scion of the original Burning Bush. Here it was that Moses received the Divine commission to deliver God's Chosen People from Egypt.

Yet more startling Divine manifestations were to be seen by the Israelites when, having left Egypt, they came with Moses into the desert of Sinai. Before all the people gathered in the plain below, *there were voices and lightnings and a dark cloud on Mt. Sinai: the voice of the trumpet sounded loud... The mount of Sinai was altogether on a smoke, because God had descended upon it in fire* (Exodus 19: 16-18). Later, when Moses had ascended the Mount alone to speak with God and receive the Commandments, he was allowed to see a small portion of the "back parts" of God's glory, having to hide in a cave that he might not see God face to face, which no man may do and live (Exodus 33: 18-23). From such contact with God the face of Moses became glorified, shining so brightly that it had to be covered by a veil whenever he descended from the Mount to speak to the people (Exodus 34: 29-35).

Only one other event is recorded in the Old Testament in connection with Mt. Sinai; once again, several centuries after the time of

## SINAI, THE MOUNT OF GOD

Moses, God appeared to one of His prophets. The Prophet Elijah, fleeing the wrath of Queen Jezebel, was instructed by an angel to walk for forty days and nights, until he arrived at the Mount of God. There the word of the Lord came to him, that He would pass by in the Mount. And so it happened, again with the accompaniment of terrible signs. *And behold, a great and strong wind rending the mountains, and crushing the rocks before the Lord; but the Lord was not in the wind. And after the wind an earthquake: but the Lord was not in the earthquake. And after the earthquake a fire; but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire the voice of a gentle breeze.* And here the Lord was and spoke with Elijah, who wrapped his face in his mantle before Him in a cave (III Kings 19:4-18).



The Holy Prophet Elijah being fed by a raven in the wilderness (III Kings 17:4-6). One tree closely resembles the cypress near the Prophet's cave on Mt. Sinai.

Mt. Sinai is not known to sacred history again until the Christian era. In the absence of any definite record, one can only speculate on any further connection of the Israelites with it. It is more than likely, however, that memory of this mountain that played so central a part in their own history and mission was preserved in the mind of Israel. It is referred to in their books of history, in the prophets, in the Psalms; and since it was definitely characteristic of the Israelites as it is of the new Chosen People, Orthodox Christians, to revere the very places where God has had dealings with men, it is not presumptuous to suppose that the mountain identified by Christians for sixteen centuries as Sinai, was likewise identified by the Israelites for at least as long a period, and that the tradition of its location is unbroken.

The region of Sinai first appears in Christian history as one of the many deserts to which fervent Christians fled, both to escape persecution by the Roman authorities and to find a place where they could practice the rigorous Christian spiritual life in peace. Outside the effective bounds of the Roman Empire, the area offered adequate shelter to hermits in its



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mountain caves, and water and food — chiefly dates — were sufficient to support a considerable number of ascetics. At one time there were perhaps as many as 7000 monks in the desert.



St. Onuphrios the Great

*The first of the great ascetics of Sinai was St. ONUPHRIOS the Great, who lived in a grotto a few miles south of Mt. Sinai for sixty years. He was a hermit in the spirit and tradition of the Prophet Elijah and St. John the Forerunner, whom he emulated, and was one of the great founding Fathers of monasticism. He was discovered, at the end of the fourth century, by the Egyptian monk St. Paphnutios, who, after recording from his own lips the story of his life, buried him there.*

As monks became more numerous, small communities were formed, consisting usually of cells grouped around a central church where the monks would come together on the eves of Sundays for services. The accounts of several pilgrims of the fourth century indicate that the Sinai desert was well populated with monks at that time, and that there was even, at the oasis of Pharan no more than thirty-five miles from Mt. Sinai, a flourishing monastic town and episcopal see. The town, together with most of the other monastic settlements in the region of Mt. Sinai, declined and died out in the first centuries of Arab Moslem rule. All that remains of Pharan today are some caves and tombs of Christian hermits, and the ruins of a cathedral and two churches.

*The attraction which desert monasticism held for early Christians can hardly be overestimated. For that austere life, without hope of reward on earth, earnest Christians willingly gave up every enticement civilized Rome could offer. St. NIL the Faster, for example, enjoying the high rank of Eparch or Governor of Constantinople, became so desirous of Christian perfection that he persuaded his wife to retire to a convent in Egypt with their daughter, and he himself took his young son with him to Mt. Sinai. He led a strict ascetic life there for sixty years, dying about 450, and left writings on the spiritual life which are included in the Philokalia.*

It was not only from ascetic labors, however, that saints were made in the Sinai desert. Even in this isolated wilderness the opportunity for martyrdom was presented to the monks, generally in the form of

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raids by pagan Saracens, who would sometimes kill all the monks in a monastery they wished to pillage.

*One of the most touching of the many accounts of Sinai martyrs is that of the young GALACTION and his wife EPISTEME, of Emesa. Determined to seek a higher than earthly love by giving their lives entirely to God, they came together to Sinai, where Galaction joined a community of monks and Episteme a small group of nuns on a hill opposite. The Roman governor sent for Galaction, and Episteme, learning in a dream that this was a summons to martyrdom, came forward and offered to die in his place. Both obtained the crown of martyrdom and thus attained in death the true and eternal union that cannot be known in this life.*

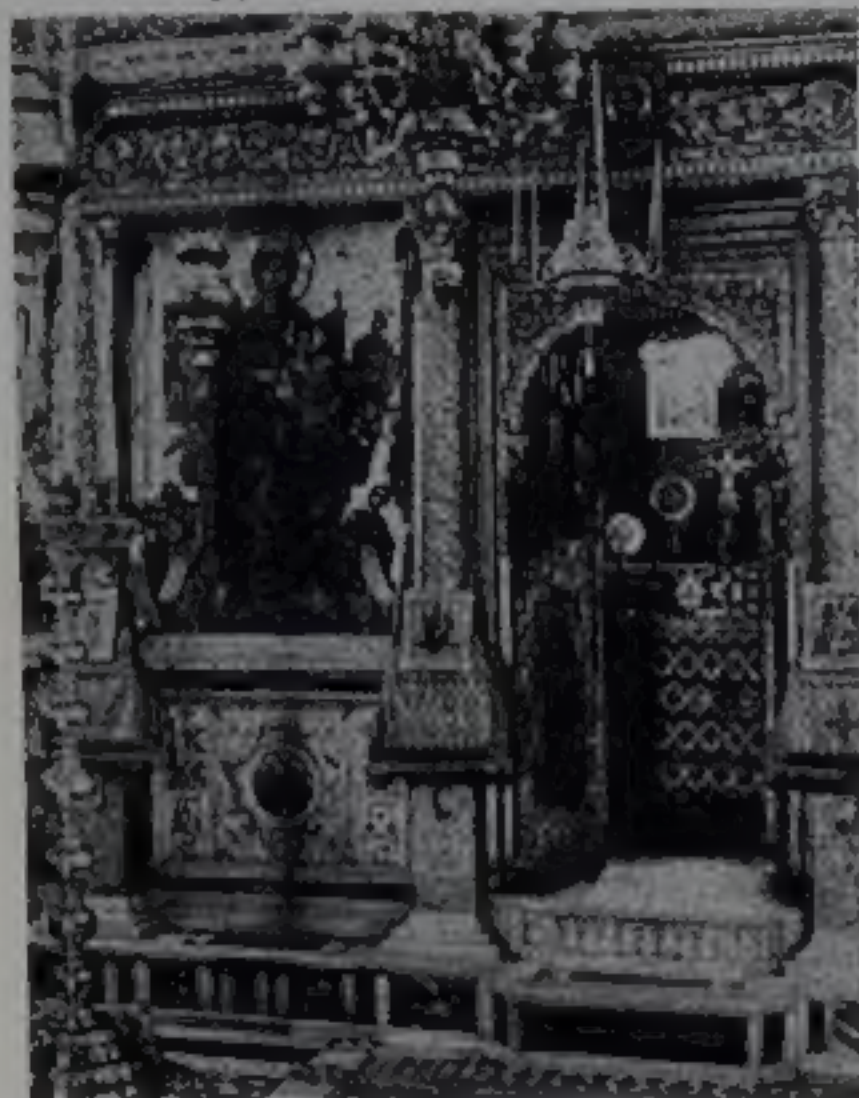
To protect themselves from the incursions of the Saracens the monks, in the sixth century, appealed to the Christian Emperor Justinian; and he, in reply, built a fortified monastery around the church at the Burning Bush. This immediately became the focal point and administrative center of the many hermitages of the area, and eventually, as the hermitages declined, it became the last outpost of the monastic life in the Sinai desert. Today, as for many centuries past, almost all the monks there live within the walls of the monastery.

The monastery of Justinian has stood to impress the pilgrims and travellers of many ages. Except for the bell tower erected in 1871 and the new library built in this century, it retains essentially its original appearance. Enclosed by immense walls of grey granite blocks fifty feet high, the monastery is in form an irregular quadrangle about 280 by 250 feet in size. The area enclosed is virtually a self-sufficient city in itself, comprising a church, cells and workshops for the monks, dining-hall, guest-houses, bakeries, library, and other buildings. On one side of the monastery, outside the walls, a garden extends for 200 feet. Here the desert has been made to blossom, thanks to the presence of abundant water from several springs. Besides the cypress trees familiar from photographs of the monastery, there are vegetables and many fruit trees, including olive, pomegranate, almond, peach, pear, and apple; the produce of these was famous centuries ago. The bones of the dead are placed, several years after death, in a crypt within the monastery walls, where they may be seen today: skulls on one side, limbs, sorted by type, on the other; only the bones of the bishop-abbots are preserved intact, each in his robes in a separate casket. The entrance to this ossuary is guarded by the robed skeleton of St. Stephanos, a sixth-century monk who in his lifetime kept watch on the path leading to the summit of the mountain.



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The church of Justinian, a beautiful example of a Byzantine basilica, is appropriately dedicated to the Transfiguration of our Lord. The



The Royal Doors and part of the iconostasis of the Church of the Transfiguration on Mt. Sinai. The icons date from the 17th century.

mosaic in the ceiling above the altar, dating from the 6th century, depicts as witnesses of the glory of Christ the very Prophets, Moses and Elijah, to whom God revealed Himself on Mt. Sinai. The monastery itself, however, is dedicated to St. Catherine, whose relics reside in the altar, for it was on the neighboring peak of Mt. St. Catherine, several miles south of the monastery, that her relics were discovered. It was these relics, perhaps as much as the Old Testament associations, that attracted pilgrims to Mt. Sinai in later centuries, especially from Western Europe, where there was great veneration for her.

*St. Catherine, who lived in fourth-century Alexandria, was of noble birth, and was noted as much for her wisdom and learning as for her great beauty. Converted to Christianity, she appeared before the Emperor Maximin and confessed her faith before him. Having refuted the fifty scholars the pagan Emperor summoned to combat the doctrines she preached, she was delivered to terrible tortures, from which she emerged radiant, her faith unshaken; angels ministered to her in her trials, destroying the spiked wheels upon which she was placed. She was finally beheaded and her body was taken by angels to the peak that now bears her name, where it was discovered by the monks several centuries later. Today a chapel marks this spot. A healing oil once flowed from her relics.*

Of the holy places around Mt. Sinai once visited by pilgrims, only a few are still tended by the monks. A chapel is located at the summit of Mt. Sinai, where the Liturgy is served every Sunday; nearby is a

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St. Catherine  
the Great Martyr

grotto identified as the place into which Moses crept when God appeared to him. On a small plateau not far below the summit stands a solitary cypress tree which, it is said, marks the spot where God appeared to Elijah; near it is a small chapel dedicated to the Prophet in front of the cave where he stayed. Here the Liturgy is served only once a year. On the way to Mt. Catherine may be seen a grotto once occupied by St. Onuphrios; near it are the ruins of the monastery dedicated to the Martyrs of Sinai and Raithu. Here there is a garden, watered by a spring, which is still tended occasionally by several monks. In the monastery church itself there are nine chapels, the most famous being that on the site of the Burning Bush, where the Divine Liturgy is celebrated every Saturday, when all benefactors and

pilgrims of the monastery throughout the ages are commemorated.

As regards its administration, St. Catherine's Monastery occupies a unique place in the Orthodox world. The Church of Sinai, composed of some twenty monks and fewer than one hundred Arabs who live in the region, is an autonomous Orthodox Church. It is administered by an abbot who is elected by the monks and then consecrated Archbishop by the Patriarch of Jerusalem; he now lives on the monastic property in Cairo, visiting the monastery only on great feast days, and the monastery itself is governed by a council of four monks. Formerly the monastery owned many properties in Eastern Europe and the Near East, but today only a few remain, several of these being in the vicinity of Mt. Sinai with one or two monks to tend them.

Today the monastery still attracts pilgrims to its holy places and relics, but the decline of fervent Christianity and of interest in the monastic life has reduced it to a shadow of its former self. To the world at large it has become a museum of Byzantine antiquity, and indeed its large collection of rare manuscripts and its many old icons have attracted scholars of many nations. But it is the monks themselves who are the living soul of the monastery, and its real significance today lies in their life of prayer and ascetic labor and their faithful watch over the Mount of God and its holy places even to the coming of the Lord.

*Eugene Rose.*



## THE HOLY FATHERS SLAIN AT SINAI AND RAITHU

**O**N JANUARY 14 the Church celebrates the memory of all the monks and hermits slain by barbarians on two occasions, once in the 4th and once in the 5th century, at Sinai and the nearby hermitage of Raithu, on the Red Sea.

On the first occasion, 40 fathers were slain at Mt. Sinai by Saracens and 39 the same day at Raithu by Blemmyes (an Arab tribe). At Mt. Sinai, as an eyewitness, the Egyptian monk Ammonios, relates, some of the monks were saved by a miracle that recalls the days of Moses. "They came to us too and would have killed all of us, had not the merciful God raised His hand. He commanded and a fire appeared on the peak of the holy Mount. A miracle occurred: the whole Mount smoked, and the fire blazed to heaven. All were seized with fear... We threw ourselves on our faces, called on God, and humbly begged Him to help us in our terrible need. The barbarians themselves were thrown into confusion by the new and unexpected sight and began suddenly to flee... When we saw them routed, we were filled to overflowing with gratitude and praised God, Who in the end had not overlooked His supplicants."

The monks who were slain met their deaths with Christian courage. Paul of Petra, Abbot of Raithu, exhorted his monks thus: "O athletes of God, do not regret this good conflict, let not your souls be faint, and do nothing unworthy of your habit, but be clothed with strength and joy and manliness, that you may endure with a pure heart, and may God receive you into His Kingdom."

Thus in death as in life the Sinai hermits gave an example of the Christian life in practice.

The information here and in the preceding article was taken primarily from:  
Lina Eckenstein, *A History of Sinai*, London, SPCK, 1921.  
Heinz Skrobucha, *Sinai*, Urs Graf-Verlag, Olten and Lausanne, 1959.

## MARTYROLOGY OF THE COMMUNIST YOKE

## THE NEW MARTYRS OF SINAI AND RAITHU



A Russified icon of the Holy Fathers of Sinai and Raithu, from the *Icon-Painters' Manual*, that would serve just as well as an icon of the New Russian Martyrs of Sinai and Raithu.

*Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and today, and forever* (Hebrews 13:8), says Saint Paul, and the two-thousand-year history of Christ's Church testifies to the truth of these words. As an illustration of the striking resemblance of true Christians at the dawn of Christianity and those of today, it would seem appropriate to introduce the phenomenon of new martyrs -- those who suffered, and still suffer, under the Communist Yoke.<sup>1</sup> There is, for example, the Russian parallel to the Fathers slain at Sinai and Raithu: the monks of a monastery near the city of Kazan dedicated to these ancient martyrs.

This monastery, founded in the 17th century near a deserted forest lake, was well known for its miraculous Gruzhiensk (Georgian) Icon of the Mother of God. Here the famed Metropolitan Philaret of Kiev, when still a young churchman, dreamed of spending the rest of his life. When the Revolution of 1917 came, the monastery with its 90 brothers was to suffer the fate of all the other Church institutions -- to be liquidated. But the local bishop, Amvrossy (Gudko), then at Sviyazhsk, having faith in the religious convictions of his people, delivered fearless anti-revolutionary sermons. In the spring of 1918 he was arrested and

1. Material on the new martyrs has been collected by Rev. M. Polsky, *Russia's New Martyrs*, 2 vols., Jordanville (1949, 1957, 3rd vol. in preparation); the present brief article is the first of a series to be taken from this important compilation.



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then accused of instigating a riot in the Raithu Monastery that occurred two days after his arrest. On that day two members of the "Cheka," accompanied by five convoyers, were sacrilegiously ransacking the altar in the monastery cathedral when an outraged mob of local peasants killed them all in the monastery yard. When it was known that the bishop was to be executed the local factory workers threatened to strike, and the bishop was set free. He continued his sermons. And just as the Raithu abbot encouraged his brothers before their martyrdom, so did Bp. Amvrossy exhort his flock before his own death: "We must rejoice that the Lord has brought us to live in such a time, when we can suffer for Him. Each of us sins his whole life, but short suffering and a crown of martyrdom will redeem every sin and give eternal blessedness, which no Cheka agents will ever be able to take away from us." In July a regiment came to town, and as soon as Trotsky arrived he ordered the bishop to be killed; he was accordingly arrested and murdered in a field near the small railroad station of Turlem. The cell-attendant Job found his beloved bishop's body. He had been pierced by a bayonet from the back and his arms had been twisted out of their sockets at the shoulders and elbows while he was still alive. The cell-attendant buried him right on the place of his martyrdom and for twelve years continued to pay the landowner for not plowing over the grave, until the land finally went to a collective farm.

In 1929 the monastery was turned into a juvenile reformatory. But once a year on January 14 monks and nuns from various destroyed monasteries, working as simple laborers in the Kazan region, would come to the snow-clad Raithu monastery to celebrate the memory of the ancient martyrs of Sinai. On such a day in 1933 the church, where a service was being conducted, was surrounded by a detachment of GPU agents, and all within were arrested, accused of "illegal assembly," and sentenced. The church was not registered, and hence was not under the future "Patriarch," Metrop. Sergy. As far as is known, ten were executed by shooting and the rest sent to concentration camps, from which few if any ever returned.

And thus the blessed God-pleasing Fathers of Sinai found their northern brethren worthy to emulate them and enter into the glory of God's Kingdom. Glory to our God! Amen.

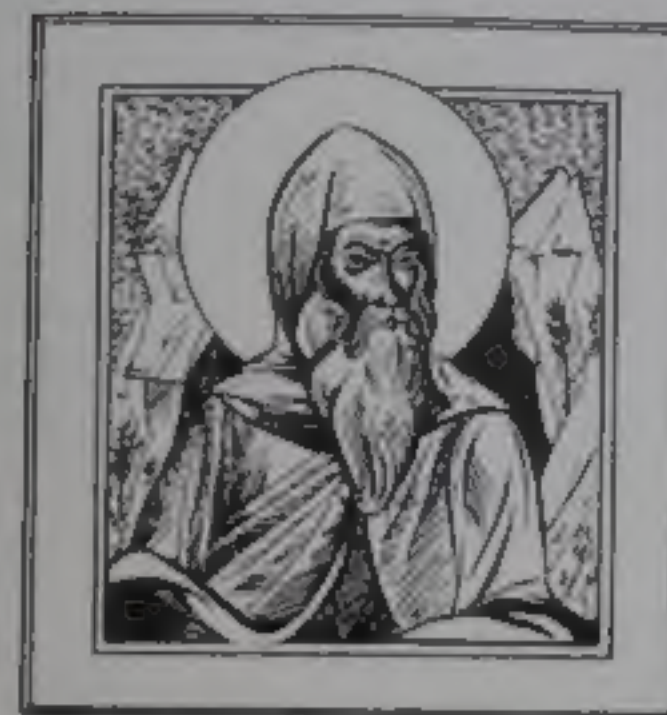
*Gleb Podmoshensky.*

## THE LIVES OF THE SAINTS

### ST. ANASTASSY, ABBOT OF MOUNT SINAI

By ST. DIMITRY OF ROSTOV<sup>1</sup>

*The patron-saint of the late Metropolitan Anastassy, St. Anastassy was yet another of the great Fathers whose holy lives adorned the Mount of God.*



**S**T. ANASTASSY WAS raised from his very youth in great piety. He was early taught to call upon Christ the true God, to believe in Him, to fear Him with unfeigned fear, with all his heart to love Him and worship Him with fitting adoration.

Having reached maturity, St. Anastassy left the world and, taking up his cross in obedience to the Evangelic commandment, he denied himself and followed Christ. He retired to a monastery and became a monk there. Wishing, however, to achieve the highest possible feats of virtue, and striving to emulate those who were perfect in virtue, St. Anastassy set out for Jerusalem and settled at Mt. Sinai, where he practiced the ascetic life together with many holy men who were successful in the feats of the monastic life.

At this time the abbot of Mt. Sinai was *St. John of the Ladder*. For his humility St. Anastassy received from God the gift of spiritual understanding and wisdom. He collected many spiritually edifying conversations, wrote the *Lives of several holy fathers*, and was found worthy to attain priestly rank.

After St. John of the Ladder and his brother George, St. Anastassy became abbot of Mt. Sinai. He labored especially at the exposure

<sup>1</sup> From *The Lives of the Saints*, based on the *Lives of St. Dimitry of Rostov*; Moscow, 1906, v. 8.



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of certain heretics called *Akethali*, i.e., "headless"; he wrote much against them, contended with them, exposed them, and covered them with shame. The heresy of the *Akethali* was born in Alexandria during the reign of the Emperor Zeno (474-491), its founders were persons who were opposed to the Fourth Ecumenical Council of the Holy Fathers, which took place at Chalcedon in 451.

St. Anastassy routed these heretics, fighting them not only at Mt. Sinai, but travelling also through Syria, Arabia, and Egypt, everywhere uprooting and banishing this heresy and confirming the Church of Christ. Having served the Lord long in this fashion, St. Anastassy departed to the Lord in extreme old age. His death occurred during the reign of the Emperor Heraclius (610-641). His memory is celebrated on April 20.

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Even the most abbreviated Sinai Patericon would be incomplete without mention of two important Fathers noted for their spiritual writings. St. John of the Ladder (Climacus), so called after his book, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*,<sup>1</sup> lived for forty years in the 7th century as a hermit near Mt. Sinai and later became abbot of the Monastery. His famous book nourished whole generations of holy men, in Russia as well as the Near East, and it is still today a principal inspirer and guide to the Orthodox ascetic life.

From a later period is another Father, the hesychast St. Gregory of Sinai, (14th century). He took his monastic vows at Mt. Sinai, later going to another holy mountain, Athos, where he instructed many in the practice of unceasing mental prayer. Many of his writings are included in the *Philokalia*.

1. English translation by Archimandrite Lazarus Moore, Faber & Faber, London, 1959.

## GREAT ORTHODOX HIERARCHS OF THE 19TH & 20TH CENTURIES

### METROPOLITAN ANASTASSY

1873-1965

By ARCHBISHOP JOHN MAXIMOVITCH

*The life of Metropolitan Anastassy, who was born on the Feast of the Transfiguration and died in the Easter season, is itself an important chapter in the history of the Church of Christ. The worthy successor of the great "Patriarch of the Church," Metropolitan Anthony, he led the dispersed Russian flock like a Moses, in faithfulness to the true God and His Holy Church. Archbishop John, a recent candidate to succeed Metropolitan Anastassy, is the last of the active bishops consecrated by Metropolitan Anthony.*

**F**ROM HIS EARLIEST years our late First Hierarch, Metropolitan Anastassy (before becoming a monk, Alexander Grihanovsky), stood out among his contemporaries both by his talents and by his high morals. Those who knew him in his youth remembered him as a talented and at the same time exceptionally pure youth who watched himself carefully, allowing himself no liberties in conduct or conversation.

After completing the seminary and Theological Academy at Holy Trinity Lavra and receiving the monastic tonsure, he was assigned first as an instructor, and after several years as the Rector, of the Moscow Seminary. On June 29, 1906, he was consecrated Bishop of Serpukhov, a vicar of the Metropolitan of Moscow. At the Theological Academy he had been a student of that great theologian and preceptor of youth, the future Metropolitan Anthony (Khrapovitsky); and now he became the closest aide of Metropolitan Vladimir (Bogoyavlensk) of Moscow (later of Kiev), the first of the clergy-martyrs of the Revolution. Already then he stood out among the hierarchs and, although one of the youngest bishops, was given responsible assignments. Thus in 1913 he was entrusted with the examination of the relics and preparations for the canonization



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of Patriarch Germogen. On the day of canonization, May 12 of that year, at which some twenty hierarchs, headed by Patriarch Gregory of Antioch, participated, it was he who delivered the sermon after the service, before a crowd of thousands.

On May 20, 1914, Bishop Anastassy was appointed to the diocese of Kholm and Lublin, and now, as a diocesan hierarch in his own right, he entered a new period of his life's work. Within two months, however, the First World War had begun, and during it the diocese of Kholm became a battlefield. Bishop Anastassy visited the wounded in hospitals as well as troops on active duty, inspiring them with spiritual strength; more than once his life was in danger. His activity was acknowledged by the Tsar with the presentation of the order of Alexander Nevsky with swords. When the diocese of Kholm was abandoned by our troops for the last time, Bishop Anastassy was transferred to Kishinev, which was likewise near the scene of battle.

Just after the sad and painful events of 1917, the All-Russian Council assembled, and Bishop Anastassy left to take an active part in it. When the candidates for Patriarch were selected, he was named one of them, and on the first ballot he received 97 votes. After the election of Archbishop Tikhon, Bishop Anastassy headed the commission that worked out the ceremony for his elevation to the Patriarchal See—a ceremony that had not been performed for more than two hundred years; and when the Patriarchal Synod was formed, the Council chose him a member.

Shortly thereafter Metrop. Vladimir (of Kiev) was murdered, and Metrop. Anthony of Kharkov was chosen in his place. The Kharkov faithful asked their pastor to name a worthy successor to himself, and Metrop. Anthony named Bishop Anastassy. His actual election, however, was not fated to occur. The civil war prevented the Diocesan Assembly from meeting to elect a bishop, and at the end of the war many hierarchs, among them Archbp. Anastassy, found themselves abroad. The Higher Church Administration of South Russia entrusted him with the direction of the Russian churches in the Near East; and when, with its arrival in Constantinople, it was transformed into the Higher Church Administration Abroad, Archbp. Anastassy, who was in Constantinople, became a member of it.

Numerous refugees had settled in camps and other places in and around Constantinople, and Archbp. Anastassy visited them and brought

order into Church life in the new conditions. With the removal of the Higher Church Administration to Serbia in 1921, he remained in Constantinople and was the representative there of the Russian Church Outside of Russia, at the same time maintaining a connection with Patriarch Tikhon through Finland and giving out information about Church events. When the Patriarch of Constantinople Meletios convened the so-called "Pan-Orthodox Congress", Archbp. Anastassy rose up decisively against acceptance of the new calendar and stood for the defense of the Church canons, refusing to agree to violations of them. At that time Patriarch Tikhon, deceived by false reports that the whole Orthodox Church had accepted the new calendar, ordered the new calendar to be introduced in Russia also; this, however, was not accepted by the people and by a part of the hierarchy. And when Patriarch Tikhon received from Archbp. Anastassy a report concerning the true state of the matter, he immediately revoked his order.

Strong pressure was brought to bear upon Archbp. Anastassy to submit to the decision of the Patriarch of Constantinople. He left Constantinople and settled in Jerusalem at the Russian Mission, where he was assigned as overseer. At the time of the disturbance that broke out in Jerusalem when the bishops rose up against their Patriarch, he aided the Patriarch of Jerusalem Damian in putting it down. The Patriarch, together with Archbp. Anastassy, consecrated new bishops, dismissing the rebels from their positions, and thus the disturbance was brought to



Photograph by W. P. Stankowski, San Francisco

Metropolitan Anastassy at a service in his summer residence in Burlingame, California, three years before his death.



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an end. Among those newly consecrated was Timothy, who was later to become Patriarch of Jerusalem.

Archbp. Anastassy entered wholeheartedly into the life of the Holy Land and established a permanent spiritual bond with it. He left Jerusalem several times to go to Serbia for the Councils of Bishops, and there he expressed his opinions always with great circumspection, weighing everything precisely, never having recourse to extremes. In everything he knew moderation. The title of "Most Wise" became solidly attached to him among the Russian bishops. Himself standing upon firm canonical ground, he showed indulgence to those who were weaker, filled with love of peace, he attempted to smooth all misunderstandings. It was with his close participation that the penance imposed upon Metropolitan Evlogy and Piaton and their clergy was removed.

At the Council of 1934 he was chosen the successor and substitute of Metrop. Anthony and raised to the rank of Metropolitan, notwithstanding his refusals, and when, on June 28, 1936, the Archbishop who was "like to the great bishop-saints of old" peacefully passed away, Metrop. Anastassy became head of the Russian Church. Thus was fulfilled the wish of Metrop. Anthony, expressed many years before, that his successor be Metrop. Anastassy.

The years when Metrop. Anastassy was First Hierarch were years of great events and shocks in the Church Outside of Russia. The Second World War broke out, laying waste the whole of Europe and unsettling almost every country, and placed the Russian Church Outside of Russia in a difficult and extremely complicated situation. Serbia, where the Synod of the Church Outside of Russia was then located, was occupied by Germany, and much tact and wisdom was required in order to preserve brotherly relations with the Serbian Church and at the same time preserve the Russian Church free from the persecutions of the conquerors.

During the bombardment of Belgrade, Metrop. Anastassy set an example of calmness and spiritual courage, continuing to serve without fail, visiting churches and keeping up the spirit of the Russian flock.

With the approach of Soviet troops, Metrop. Anastassy took with him the wonderworking Kursk Icon of the Mother of God and left for Central Europe almost entirely alone. As soon as the war had ended he reestablished contact with all of Russia Abroad and reactivated the Synod of Bishops. There were many slanders and accusations against Metrop. Anastassy from those who wished to prevent the existence of a free

## METROPOLITAN ANASTASSY

Russian Church, but these were all dispelled like smoke, and the authority of Metrop. Anastassy grew to world proportions. In Germany he visited refugee camps, raising and strengthening the spirit of the refugees, he also visited several European countries, and his spiritual countenance was imprinted on the souls of the flock there, which found itself in distressing circumstances.

When a significant part of the refugees had moved to the New World, Metrop. Anastassy, at the request of the Russian bishops living in the United States, decided to transfer the Synod to America. Metrop. Anastassy arrived in New York in November, 1950. Within three days he had consecrated the church at Holy Trinity Monastery in Jordanville and opened the first session in America of the Council of Bishops, then also there was performed for the first time outside of Russia the rite of preparing and consecrating the Chrism.<sup>1</sup> After this, Councils of Bishops met under the presidency of Metrop. Anastassy in 1953, 1956, 1959, and 1962.

The arrival of Metrop. Anastassy revived Church life in America. New churches and parishes began to open where before there had been only newly-arrived refugees from Europe and Asia. Metrop. Anastassy's visits to various cities after his arrival in America were real holidays for these places, the Russian Church Outside of Russia became consolidated and flourished. Thanks to these and later visits the Metropolitan established an active bond with his flock.

With the help of admirers of Metrop. Anastassy, the Synod obtained a large house in New York City, here a cathedral and a house-church were built and two schools were opened -- a Saturday school for those attending American schools, and a regular daily high school.<sup>2</sup> At the Councils of Bishops, presided over by Metrop. Anastassy, there was worked out a new Regulation on the Russian Church Outside of Russia, corresponding to the changed circumstances.

In 1956 the whole of Russia Abroad festively marked the rare occasion of its First Hierarch's fiftieth anniversary jubilee of service as a bishop. After this, Metrop. Anastassy guided the Church Outside of Russia for several years more, retaining possession of all his faculties, but his strength began noticeably to decline.

1. For the first time in the history of the Christian Church the supply for all the Chrism used in the Russian Church Outside of Russia is furnished by the head of the Church.

2. St. Sergius, the first school of its kind in America. From 1950.



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At the beginning of Great Lent in 1963 the Metropolitan became ill and spent several days in the hospital, and after that his health was shaken. In January, 1964, he decided to go into retirement and proposed to the Council of Bishops to elect a successor to himself. Assembling on the Sunday of the Myrrh-bearing Women, the members of the Council, at the proposal of the new Metropolitan, Philaret, elected Metrop. Anastassy honorary President of the Council and Synod of Bishops, presenting him with the title of Most Blessed and the right to wear two panagias. After this Metrop. Anastassy continued to take an interest in affairs, although he lived in complete seclusion.

Unable to attend services every day, he listened to them for the last few years by means of a special amplifier connected to his room, and several times a week he received Holy Communion. His hearing and sight declined a great deal. Entering completely into his inner life, he nonetheless sometimes felt better and invited his near ones to his quarters.

After the return of Metrop. Philaret from Australia in the middle of February, 1965, Metrop. Anastassy for the last time invited all the hierarchs then assembled in Synod to his quarters and sat conversing with them. At Easter the Metropolitan served, but at Mid-Pentecost he once more fell ill, he received Unction, and on the feast of St. Nicholas, before the All-Night Vigil Service, at which were sung hymns of Easter and the Resurrection, he gave his soul to the Lord God, having served almost 59 years as a bishop. Such a long service in the rank of bishop is unknown in the whole thousand-year history of the Russian Church.

The Risen Christ received into His Kingdom His servant who bore the name of Resurrection (which is the meaning of Anastassy in Greek).

## THE ICONS OF THE GREAT FEASTS

# THE TRANSFIGURATION OF OUR LORD AND SAVIOUR JESUS CHRIST

AUGUST 6

Troparion of the Feast, Tone 4

*Thou wast transfigured upon the mount, O Christ our God,  
showing Thy glory to Thy Disciples as far as they could bear it.  
may Thy everlasting Light illumine also us sinners  
by the prayers of the Mother of God. O Giver of Light, Glory to Thee*



**F**ORTY DAYS BEFORE He was delivered to an ignominious death for our sins, our Lord revealed to three of His Disciples the glory of His Divinity. *And after six days Jesus taketh Peter, James, and John his brother, and bringeth them up into a high mountain apart, and was transfigured before them: and His face did shine as the sun, and His raiment was white as the light* (St. Matthew 17: 1-2). This was the event to which our Lord was referring when He said, *There be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of Man coming in His Kingdom* (St. Matthew 16: 28). By this means the faith of the Disciples was strengthened and prepared for the trial of the Lord's approaching Passion and death, and they were enabled to see in it not mere human suffering, but the entirely voluntary Passion of the Son of God.

The Disciples saw also Moses and Elijah talking with our Lord, and thereby they understood that He was not Himself Elijah or another of the prophets, as some thought, but someone much greater: He Who could call upon the Law and the Prophets to be His witnesses, since He was the fulfilment of both. The three Parables of the Feast concern the appearance of God to Moses and Elijah on Mt. Sinai, and it is indeed

Sources

In Russian: S. V. Bulgakov, *Manual for Orthodox Priests (Nastolnaya Kniga)*, Ahar'kov, 1900.

In English: L. Ouspensky and V. Lossky, *The Meaning of Icons*, Boston, 1952.



## THE ORTHODOX WORD

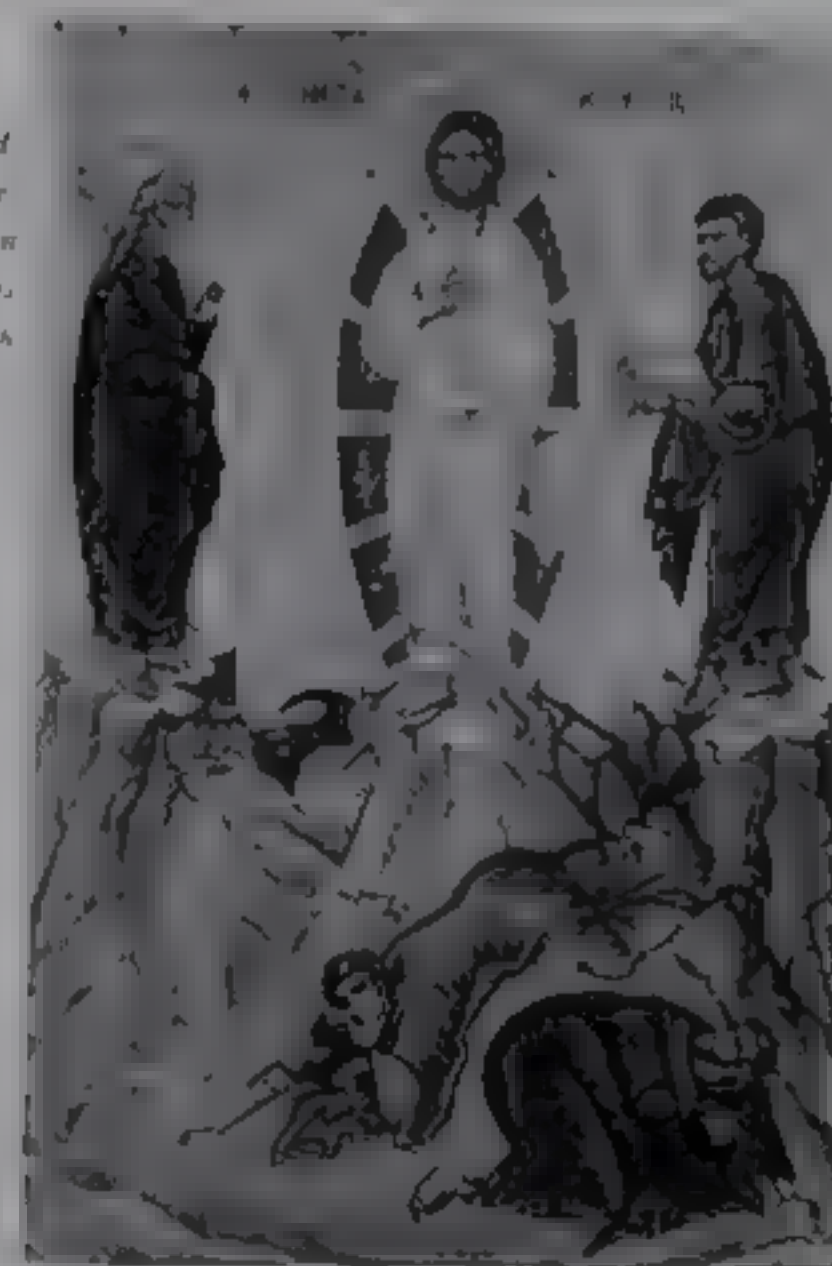
appropriate that the greatest God-seers of the Old Testament should be present at the glorification of the Lord in His New Testament, seeing for the first time His Humanity, even as the Disciples were seeing for the first time His Divinity.

The Transfiguration, counted by the Church as one of the Twelve Great Feasts, had an important place in the Church calendar already in the fourth century, as the homilies and sermons of such Fathers as St. John Chrysostom, St. Ephraem of Syria, and St. Cyril of Alexandria attest; its origins go back to the first Christian centuries. In the fourth century also, St. Helena erected a church on Mt. Tabor, traditional site of the Transfiguration, dedicated to the Feast. Although the event celebrated in the Feast occurred in the month of February, forty days before the Crucifixion, the Feast was early transferred to August because its full glory and joy could not be fittingly celebrated amid the sorrow and repentance of Great Lent. The sixth day of August was chosen as being forty days before the Feast of the Exaltation of the Cross (Sept. 14), when Christ's Passion is again remembered.

The icon of the Feast is also quite old. The sixth-century mosaic above the altar of the Church of the Transfiguration at Mt. Sinai is already a perfect example of this icon. In all icons of the Transfiguration Christ, arrayed in white, stands in the center in a luminous aureole, which is apparently the "bright cloud" before which the Disciples fall on their faces (St. Matthew 17: 5-6). The Prophet Elijah is at the left and Moses (holding a book, generally the tables of the Decalogue) at the right, conversing with Him. Below, the three Disciples are in various postures indicating astonishment and awe. Generally, St. Peter is on one side (here, the left), kneeling and with one hand to his face, St. John is in the center, falling, with his back to the light; St. James is on the side opposite St. Peter, falling to his knees away from the light. Some, especially Russian, icons after the thirteenth century emphasize more the attitudes of the Disciples, depicting them as completely overwhelmed by the vision; but in the icon reproduced here the serenity of the early Byzantine iconographic type is preserved.

Orthodox theology sees in the Transfiguration a prefiguration of our Lord's Resurrection and His Second Coming, and more than this—since every event of the Church calendar has an application to the individual spiritual life—of the transformed state in which Christians

*The Transfiguration of our Lord  
by the ever-memorable Greek iconographer  
FOTIS KONTOGLOU, who died in  
August of this year. From the iconostasis  
of Holy Transfiguration Greek Orthodox  
Monastery, Boston, Mass.*



shall appear at the end of the world, and in some measure even before then. In the foreshadowing of future glory which is celebrated in this Feast, the Holy Church comforts her children by showing them that after the temporary sorrows and deprivations with which this earthly life is filled, the glory of eternal blessedness will shine forth, and in it even the body of the righteous will participate.

It is a pious Orthodox custom to offer fruits to be blessed at this Feast; and this offering of thanksgiving to God conceals a spiritual sign too. Just as fruits ripen and are transformed under the action of the summer sun, so is man called to a spiritual transfiguration through the light of God's word by means of the Sacraments. Some saints, under the action of this life-giving grace, have shone bodily before men even in this life with this same Uncreated Light of God's glory, and that is another sign to us of the heights to which we, as Christians, are called and the state that awaits us—to be transformed in the image of Him Who was transfigured on Mt. Tabor.

*Eugene Ross*





THE ORTHODOX SPIRITUAL LIFE

## THE TRANSFIGURATION OF OUR LORD AND SAVIOUR JESUS CHRIST IN THE HEARTS OF MEN

*Seek ye first the Kingdom of God, and His righteousness,  
and all these things shall be added unto you*

St. Matthew 6:33

*The Kingdom of God is within you*

St. Luke 17:21

**THIS IS THE GOAL** and the meaning of life for a Christian -- to seek, first of all, personal contact with God. The very word *religion* (from Latin *religare* -- to bind, tie, connect) means the reestablishment of a link, a connection with God, living personal contact with Whom was lost after the fall of man. The coming of our Lord Jesus Christ restored it, but only objectively: the other, subjective half of the restoration depends entirely on man's free will and his hard labor for its attainment. The Holy Orthodox Church is the means by which this union can be achieved; and her history only continues to prove the presence of the Holy Spirit in men. It is the love of God in men that brings about this transformation. God, seeing men striving toward Him, sheds grace upon their hearts and gives a foretaste of Heaven to come.

How this process, the *Orthodox spiritual experience*, begins can be apprehended from the following extract from the *Philokalia*. It was written by *St. Simeon the New Theologian* and is possibly autobiographical in nature. It can well serve as an introduction to the Orthodox spiritual life.

OPPOSITE: *The Blessed Skhima Sisterment Through the Eyes  
for Christ & Sake of the Kiev Caran-Mena 1871. See page 152.*



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*St. Simeon the New Theologian, the last of only three holy writers (the others being St. John the Evangelist and St. Gregory Nazianzen) whom the Orthodox Church designates by the title of "Theologian," lived in 10th-century Constantinople and left a Court life to enter the famed Studite Monastery to join his starets, Simeon the Devout. Twice he founded monasteries, where he wrote his profound homilies, and twice he left the monasteries for life in seclusion. His disciple and biographer, Nicetas Stethatos, collected his writings even before the death of the Saint, which occurred early in the 11th century. The Church celebrates his memory on March 12, the day of his death.*

### I. THE STATE OF TRANSFIGURATION<sup>1</sup>

"There lived in Constantinople a young man by the name of George, about twenty years old. All this happened in our lifetime, in our own memory.... He made the acquaintance of a certain monk, who lived in one of the monasteries in Constantinople, a man of holy life. Revealing to this monk the innermost secrets of his heart, he also told him of his ardent desire to save his soul. The good father, after some needful words of direction, gave him a small rule to follow and a book of *St. Mark the Ascetic* in which he writes on spiritual law. The young man accepted the book with as much love and reverence as if it had been sent to him by God Himself, and conceived a strong faith in it, hoping to gain from it great benefit and much fruit. He read it through with much zeal and attention and received great help from it all. But three paragraphs made a particularly deep impression on his heart. The first was: *If you seek to be healed, take care of your conscience (listen to it), and do what it tells you: this will profit you.*<sup>2</sup> The second: *He who seeks (hopes to receive) active grace of the Holy Spirit before practising the commandments, is like a slave bought for money who, the moment he is bought, expects his freedom to be signed, together with the payment of his purchase price.*<sup>3</sup> The third: *He who prays physically, without having yet acquired spiritual reason, is like the blind man who cried: 'Son of David, have mercy on me' (St. Mark 10: 48). But another man who had been blind, when his eyes were opened and he saw the Lord, no longer called Him Son of David, but worshipped Him as the Son of God (St. John 9: 35, 38).*<sup>4</sup> These three paragraphs pleased him greatly and he

1. *Writings from the Philokalia on Prayer of the Heart*, trans. by Kadloubovsky and Palmer, Faber & Faber London 1962 pp. 143-148. Russian *Philokalia*, vol. 5. (Title added.)

2. *Two Centuries on Spiritual Law*, Para. 69 (Russian *Philokalia*, vol. 1).

3. *Ibid.*, Para. 64

4. *Ibid.*, Para. 13, 14

## THE TRANSFIGURATION

believed that, as the first paragraph asserts, by attention to his conscience the ills of his soul would be cured; that he would be made active by the Holy Spirit through obedience to commandments, as the second paragraph teaches, and that, by the grace of the Holy Spirit, his inner eyes would be opened and he would see the ineffable beauty of the Lord, as the third paragraph promises. -- And so he became wounded by the love of this beauty and, though as yet he did not see it, conceived a strong longing for it and sought it assiduously, in the hope of finding it in the end.



St Simeon  
the New Theologian

"In spite of all this, he did nothing special (as he assured me on oath), except that every evening without fail he practised the small rule given him by his starets, and never went to bed to sleep without performing it. But after some time his conscience began to urge him: Make a few more prostrations, recite a few extra psalms, repeat 'Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me!' as many more times as you can. He willingly obeyed his conscience and did all it suggested without thought, as though it were a command of God Himself. He never went to bed with his conscience reproaching him: why did you not do this or that? Thus he always listened to his conscience, never leaving undone whatever it suggested to him. And every day his conscience added more and more to his usual rule, and in a few days his evening prayers swelled to great proportions. His days were spent in the house of a certain Patriky, his work being to cater for the needs of all the people living there. But every evening he went away, and no one knew what he did at home. What he actually did was to shed copious tears, to make a great many genuflections, prostrating himself with his face to the ground. When he stood at prayer he always kept his feet tightly pressed together and stood without moving, with a grieving heart, with sighing and tears he recited prayers to the Holy Virgin; addressing himself to our Lord Jesus Christ, he fell at His immaculate feet as if He had been there in the flesh, and implored Him to have mercy on him, as He once had on the blind man,



## THE ORTHODOX WORD

and to open the eyes of his soul. Each evening his prayers grew longer and longer so that, at last, he stood at prayer till midnight. Yet he never permitted himself when at prayer, either slackness or negligence, or easy postures, never let his eyes turn to the right or left or upwards to look at something, but stood motionless, like a pillar or as though he had no body.

"Once, when he was thus standing at prayer, saying more in his mind than with his lips: 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner,' a brilliant Divine radiance descended on him from above and filled all the room. Thereupon the young man forgot that he was in a room, or beneath a roof, for on all sides he saw nothing but light; he was not even aware of standing on the ground. All worldly cares left him, and there came to his mind no thoughts common to men clothed with flesh. He became wholly dissolved in this transubstantial light and it seemed to him that he himself became light. So he forgot the whole world and was filled with tears and unspeakable joy. Thereupon his mind rose upwards to heaven and there he saw another light, brighter than the light which surrounded him. And to his surprise it seemed to him that on the edge of this light stood the holy and angelic starets who had given him the small precept on prayer and the book of St. Mark the Ascetic.

"On hearing this from the young man, I thought that he had been greatly helped by the prayers of his starets, and that God had granted him this vision to show the high level of virtue on which this starets stood. As the young man said later, when the vision vanished and he came to himself, he found himself filled with joy and wonder, shedding copious tears, his heart filled with great sweetness. Finally he went to bed, but immediately a cock began to crow, showing that it was already past midnight. A little later he heard the church bells ringing for matins; so the young man got up, according to his custom, to read the early morning service. Thus he never slept that night—the thought of sleep never entered his mind.

"How all this came to pass, only the Lord knows, for it was all His inscrutable work. Yet this youth did nothing in particular, except always to adhere firmly to the rule given him by the starets and to follow the instructions contained in the little book, with unshakable faith and undaunted hope. Let no one say that he did all this as a test. Such a thing never entered his mind. He who makes tests does not possess firm faith. But brushing aside every passionate or self-indulgent thought, this youth

## THE TRANSFIGURATION

was so anxious to perform exactly what his conscience suggested, that he no longer had any feeling for the things of this world, finding no pleasure even in eating and drinking his fill.

Have you heard, brethren, what faith in God can do, when it shows in right actions? Have you understood that youth does not hinder, nor old age help, if a man lacks reason and the fear of God? Have you realised that the world and its cares do not hinder in fulfilling God's commandments, when there is zeal and attention? That silence and retirement from the world are useless, if laziness and negligence prevail?... But this youth was tied to worldly affairs, cared only for the temporal, had no time even to think of anything higher than earth, and yet—wonderful are the ways of the Lord!—as soon as he heard a few words from that holy starets and read three paragraphs of St. Mark's, he immediately believed what he heard and read and, without the shadow of doubt and with unshakable hope, put it into practice. Thus, through the little work he did, and by the intercession of the Holy Virgin, he was found worthy of raising his mind to heaven. With the help of Her prayers he gained God's mercy and drew to himself the grace of the Holy Spirit, which pervaded him with such force that he was able to see that light to which many aspire, but which few are given to see. This youth kept no long fasts, did not sleep on bare earth, did not wear a hair shirt, had not left the world in body but only in spirit—by disposition of his soul—kept only short vigils, and yet became higher than the wonderful Lot of Sodom, or rather became an angel in human flesh—externally a man, but inwardly an angel. Therefore he was given to see the most sweet light of the spiritual sun of truth, our Lord Jesus Christ, which light convinced him that he would be granted the light of the life to come. And so it was in truth, for love and the cleaving of his heart to God brought him into ecstasy, tore his spirit away from this world, out of his own self and all else, and transformed him wholly into the light of the Holy Spirit. Yet he lived in a city, was steward to a large house and looked after the needs of freemen and slaves, performing all that was due in this life."



St. Mark the Ascetic.



## THE ORTHODOX WORD

*St. Mark the Ascetic was one of the great Church Fathers of the 4th century. He lived as a hermit in Egypt, attaining great old age, and was known for his writings of spiritual direction. St. Makarios of Alexandria testified to the height of his spiritual attainment, saying that he saw him receive Holy Communion by the hand of an angel. The Church celebrates his memory on March 5.*

## II. THE LIGHT OF MT. TABOR

*Know ye not that your bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit, Who is in you, Whom ye have from God?*  
I Cor. 6:19

Just as our Lord Jesus Christ at His Transfiguration on Mt. Tabor shone with the Uncreated Light, likewise His ardent followers throughout the whole course of the Church's existence were to experience the same Light as the grace of God touched their hearts. History and Church Tradition testify that this apparent likeness of Christ in worthy Christians was present in the earliest period as well as in all that followed. Many Holy Fathers spoke of this Light, but it was *St. Gregory Palamas* in the 14th century who was to set a firm dogmatic basis in the teaching of the Orthodox Church concerning the Divine Light dwelling in the human body. He taught that it was the same Light that was in Moses as God spoke to him on Mt. Sinai, in our Lord Jesus Christ as revealed during His Transfiguration, and in many saints — martyrs, ascetics, hesychasts. In Russia, although separated by five centuries from *St. Gregory*, it was *St. Seraphim of Sarov*<sup>1</sup> who was known, more than any other canonized saint, to manifest the same Divine Light. The 20th century too has seen a startling revelation of God's glory as rays of the uncreated Divine Light transfigured the fragile figure of a humble monk, *Joseph of Optina Monastery*, whose starets, the well-known *Skhima-hieromonk Amvrossy*, was one of the very brightest stars in the galaxy of Russia's uncanonized saints of the last two centuries.

Optina Monastery was the center of the students and followers of the great *Starets Paisy Velichkovsky*. There, well protected from the ways of the world by virgin forests, they carefully studied and scrupulously copied and recopied *Starets Paisy's* translations of the writings of the Holy Fathers of the *Philokalia*. The Orthodox monastic tradition, the insight and perseverance of the monks and, above all, the grace of

1. See *A Conversation of St. Seraphim of Sarov with N. A. Motovilov*, Jordanville, 1962.

## THE TRANSFIGURATION

God — produced a spring of "Living Water" that abundantly flowed there to all the thousands of pilgrims that came, thirsty for spiritual comfort, seeking the truth. Among them were men like Gogol, Dostoevsky, Vladimir Soloviev and others. Today these men are thoroughly studied and could render service as intermediaries of Orthodox spirituality, but the decisive impress on the truly Christian Optina left upon these men is little noticed in the West — and thus the whole realm of the Orthodox spiritual experience and life still remains a *terra incognita* to the Western mind.

*Father Amvrossy (1812-1891) came to Optina in his twenties and became a true disciple at first of Starets Leonid (Lev in skhima) and then Starets Makary, whom he was to succeed as father-confessor, i.e., Starets, until his death. He was extremely loved by people and exercised an extraordinary gift of clairvoyance and healing. The following two excerpts from his biography<sup>1</sup> give an idea of the level of his spiritual perfection as the grace of the Divine Light becomes visible to the naked eye of the men who surrounded him.*

One morning the monk-correspondent of the Optina skete, Hieromonk Benedict, came to the Starets as he habitually did at the end of the morning office. The Starets, having finished listening to the monastic rule of prayers, sat down on his bed. Fr. Benedict approached him to get a blessing and, to his great astonishment, saw that the face of the Starets was shining! But as soon as he received the blessing this wonderful light disappeared. Some time after that Fr. Benedict again came to the Starets, when he was already in another room and was busy with people, and with a simple heart asked the Starets: "Or perhaps, Batiushka, you've seen some vision?" The Starets didn't say a word to him, only slightly tapped him on the head with his hand, a sign of the Starets' affection.

Fr. Amvrossy did not like to pray when he was seen by people. The cell attendant who was reading the monastic rule of prayer was to

1. *The Life of Optina Starets Skhima-hieromonk Amvrossy* by Rev. Sergey Chetverskov, Convent of Shamordino, Kaluga 1912, p. 24.



\* Starets Amvrossy of Optina



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stand in another room. A hieromonk of the skete decided at that particular time to approach the Father. A paracletic canon to the Mother of God was being read. The eyes of Fr. Amvrossy were lifted heavenward, his face radiated with joy: a bright glowing light played on it so that this hieromonk could not endure it. Such incidents, when the face of the Starets, filled with ultimate goodness, would become miraculously transfigured and shine with the Light of grace, occurred primarily in the morning hours during or after the reading of his monastic rule of prayer."

## III. THE TRANSFIGURED WORLD

*And He said unto them, Unto you it is given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God*

St. Mark 4: 11

At Mt. Tabor our Lord Jesus Christ gloriously revealed to the human race not the miracle of the Light of Transfiguration alone, but also the very phenomenon of the Transfigured World, when, in spite of the laws of time and space, He conversed with the living prophets Moses and Elijah who were regarded as dead hundreds of years before. There are two worlds: the one we see, the temporal; and the other, the spiritual, that starts while we are on this earth and, going beyond death into the *Age to come*, reveals itself as the Transfigured World.

While the wisest men of this world employ all their intellectual power to re-shape the temporal world into a perfect place, a "paradise" on earth, and as a result only lead whole nations into misery — men of God are silent! The seeming silence of God's servants, however, only hides the *unseen warfare* against the Prince of this World in the battlefield of their hearts, by which they are led to the acquisition of the Holy Spirit, opening the true paradise while a man is still on earth. *Silence*, says St. Isaac of Syria, *is the mystery of the coming Age, while words are only the tools of this world*.

*If any one of you thinks himself wise in this world*, says St. Paul, *let him become a fool, that he may come to be wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God* (I Cor. 3: 18-19). For unity with God is man's real wisdom that enlightens things even beyond the boundaries of this world.

Men who die to this world and employ themselves in constant prayer, reach a stage of transfiguration and thus, by the grace of God, partake in the Transfigured World. Such are the true sons of the Ortho-

## THE TRANSFIGURATION

dox Church. The first centuries of Christianity were abundant in them, as witness the *Fathers of the Church*. Then, as the missionary movement spread, these men witnessed the Christian Heaven to all corners of the earth. In Russia it was Kiev that first produced men of this Kingdom of God, hiding from the world in caves they founded the famous Cave-monastery in the 11th century. A startling revelation of this Transfigured World, relatively close to our time, is the life and deeds of a *fool for Christ's sake*, a monk of the same monastery, a great saint, although not yet officially canonized, who has never been introduced to the English-speaking Orthodox world. It would be spiritually beneficial to cite an incident from his Life,<sup>1</sup> briefly illustrating the living Transfigured World, which actually ought to be the property of every baptized Christian, as our Lord Jesus Christ says: *Truly I say unto you: he who believes in Me, the works which I do, he shall do also* (St. John 14: 12).

*Skhima Hieromonk THEOPHIL Gorenkovsky (1788-1853) was of Ukrainian descent and, after becoming an orphan at a young age, entered a monastery, where he took a special liking to the Psalter, from which he never parted even up to the last day of his life. Taking upon himself the severest podvig of being a fool-for-Christ, he won himself sainthood and was extremely loved and treated as a holy man by faithful throughout the whole of Russia. Even up to this day he intercedes especially in cases of prayer to him to find lost things.*

"This occurred in May, 1853, half a year before the passing of the blessed Starets. 'Panteleimon,' he said to his cell-attendant one afternoon, 'let's go to the forest to pray to God'.

They went. They wandered in the forest until they got tired. The blessed Starets while walking was reading the Gospel, singing psalms, and knitting a sock. When evening came and the sun began to set, the wanderers turned home. The Starets stopped and said, 'Panteleimon, why don't we sit on the hill for a while and admire the holy Lavra.' The tired cell-attendant was hoping for just this, and, happily stretching himself on the grass, dozed off. Half an hour passed. Suddenly the blessed Starets shouted. 'Panteleimon! Look, some pilgrims are coming. Run and call them to come here—'

The sleepy cell-attendant lifted his head and, seeing a party of pilgrims walking down the road, called them to the Starets. 'May God help you,' the Starets greeted them. 'Thank you, batiushka,' the men answered. 'You probably haven't eaten anything?' the Starets asked.

<sup>1</sup> From Vladimir Znosko, *Skhima Hieromonk Theophil, Fool for Christ's Sake*, Kiev-Pechersk Lavra, 1906.



## THE ORTHODOX WORD

"You're right, batiushka. We've had some dried bread with water, but we haven't even tasted any hot food the whole week." "That's all right... You just sit down here and have a little talk... The Mother of God will feed you in a minute."

"And having seated them he pulled out of his basket an iron pot, dug a little hole in the ground with a knife, and sent the cell-attendant to pick some twigs for firewood. 'But why do you need the firewood, batiushka?' said the surprised cell-attendant, knowing that there was nothing to cook. 'Silly,' the Starets insisted, 'don't you see that the pilgrims must be fed...' The twigs were brought, but there was still no fire. 'What a pity,' said Panteleimon regretfully. 'We have no fire.' 'And what about God?' said the Starets. And lifting his eyes heavenward he began to pray... Then he made a prostration towards the east and made the Sign of the Cross over the pot, saying, 'In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit...' Hardly had he uttered these words when smoke appeared from under the pot and the twigs began to burn."

"Seeing such a miracle, Panteleimon wanted to run, but the Starets stopped him and ordered him to pick some fine grass and throw it into the pot, while he himself put in several small stones and a piece of ice from his basket. When all this began to boil, the Starets, never ceasing to pray inwardly, blessed the pot once more and stirred. 'Well, now try it,' he said. Panteleimon dipped a spoon into the pot and carefully tasted it. 'Batiushka,' he exclaimed in amazement, 'why, that's manna porridge.' 'Well, silly, pour it out quickly for the guests; it will get cold soon.'"

"With joy and awe the cell-attendant began to pour the porridge into the pilgrims' soup-bowls, and -- another miracle! No matter how much he poured out, the porridge in the pot did not diminish; everyone was fed, and the pot seemed still to be full. For just as once the small breads were multiplied for the multitude in the desert (St. Matthew 14: 19), so this food too was multiplied, by the prayers of Starets Theophil."

"Well, now go with God," said the Starets gently, addressing the pilgrims when they had finished their meal. "Go to the holy Lavra and pray for all..."

"Completely overwhelmed by the miracle, the men went their way and, in the Lavra, began telling everyone with joy and fear about the miracle that had taken place before their eyes."

*Gleb Podmoshensky.*

## PRELEST

### THE TEACHING OF THE HOLY FATHERS ON SPIRITUAL SELF-DECEPTION

ACCORDING TO BISHOP IGNATY BRIANCHANINOV

By I. M. KONTZEVICH<sup>1</sup>

*The path to spiritual transfiguration, and indeed the search for truth on any level, meet with obstacles -- not so often a direct opposition as a subtle, Satanic allurement -- of which every Orthodox Christian should be aware.*

**T**HE CHIEF DANGER in undertaking ascetic endeavor lies in the possibility of becoming subject to self-deception or *prelest*. "All the forms of *prelest*," says Bp. Ignaty,<sup>2</sup> "to which the athlete of prayer is subject arise from the fact that *repentance* has not been placed at the foundation of prayer, that repentance has not been made the soul and aim of prayer. He who attempts to ascend to the wedding of the Son of God not in clean and bright wedding clothes,<sup>3</sup> which are made by repentance, but straightway in rags, in a state of self-deception and sinfulness, is cast forth into the outer darkness: into demonic *prelest*."

Humility is the constant companion of sanctity; sanctity is unthinkable without it. "The humility with which *St. Simon the New Theologian* recognizes his imperfection, and contritely repents his past sins and falls, serves as a guarantee that his mystical experience is completely free of the element of *prelest* and spiritual pride. In ascetical literature there are innumerable warnings to those just beginning the monastic life not to succumb to false visions, not to be seduced, not to take an angel of darkness for an Angel of Light. Likewise we find in *St. Simeon* admonishments not to trust the unimaginable variety of knockings, voices, frightful apparitions, visions of perceptible light, fragrant odors, and so forth,

1. From *The Acquisition of the Holy Spirit in Ancient Russia* (in Russian), Paris, 1952, pp. 28ff.

2. All citations from *On Prelest* in Vol. 1 of the complete *Works* of Bp. Ignaty, St. Petersburg, 1865, pp. 132-148.

3. In antiquity a king would send a special court dress to those invited to his banquet. In the parable of the Saviour, the wedding clothes symbolize the grace of the Holy Spirit sent by God to the ascetic.



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which come to the ascetic at prayer... Together with humility, the mystic is protected from the danger of falling into some kind of false mysticism of a secret tie with the Church."<sup>1</sup>

All the various forms of self-deception or prelest fall into two categories and proceed, first, from defective activity of the mind, and second, from defective activity of the heart (feeling). "It is foolish pride to desire and strive to see spiritual visions with a mind not purified of passions and not renewed and recreated by the right hand of the Holy Spirit; it is the same kind of pride and foolishness for the heart to desire and strive for the enjoyment of holy and Divine feelings, when it is still completely unfit for them" (Bp. Ignaty).

The first kind of prelest, owing to excitement of the mind and imagination, often ends in insanity and suicide; the second, which is called "fancy," although it more rarely ends so tragically -- because fancy, even though it leads the mind into the most frightful delusions, still does not cast it into delirium as in the first case -- is nonetheless just as ruinous. The ascetic, striving to kindle in his heart love for God while neglecting repentance, exerts himself to attain a feeling of delight, of ecstasy, and as a result he attains precisely the opposite: "he enters into communion with Satan and becomes infected with hatred for the Holy Spirit."

"Fancy," in various degrees, is to be found everywhere: "Everyone who does not have a contrite spirit, who recognizes any kind of merit and worth in himself; everyone who does not hold unwaveringly the teaching of the Orthodox Church, but on some tradition or other has thought out his own arbitrary judgement or followed a non-Orthodox teaching -- is in this state of prelest. The degree of prelest is determined by the degree of deviation and obstinacy in deviation" (Bp. Ignaty).

In the fallen state, out of all feelings only one "can be utilized in invisible worship: sorrow for sins, for sinfulness, for falls, for our damnation; this is called mourning, repentance, contrition of spirit... *Sacrifice to God is a contrite spirit; a contrite and humbled heart God will not despise* (Ps. 50:17)" (Bp. Ignaty).

Let us cite a characteristic instance of prelest arising from excitement of the mind and imagination, taken from the words of Bp. Ignaty.

1. Archim. Prof. Cyprian, "The Spiritual Forerunners of (St.) Gregory Palamas," in *Theological Thought*, 1942, p. 113.

## PRELEST

A monk visited him and said to him: "Father, pray for me, I sleep and eat much." As he was saying this, Bp. Ignaty felt a heat issuing from him. In order to make clear the spiritual state of the monk, Bp. Ignaty asked him to instruct him in prayer. "And, horrors!" this monk began to teach him a "method of ecstatic, visionary prayer." In what followed it became clear that the monk was completely unacquainted with the teaching of the Holy Fathers on prayer. "In the course of our conversation I said to him," Bp. Ignaty further relates: "Look, Starets, you are going to be living in Petersburg, don't by any means take a room on an upper floor; be sure to take one on the ground floor." "Why so?" replied the monk. "Because," I replied, "if the thought ever occurs to angels suddenly to seize you and transport you from Petersburg to Athos, and they take you from an upper floor, if they drop you you will be killed; but if they take you from the ground floor and drop you, you will only injure yourself." "If you only knew," replied the monk, "how many times, when I have been standing at prayer, the vivid thought came to me that angels would carry me off and put me on Athos." It turned out that this skhima-hieromonk wore chains, hardly ever slept, ate little food, and felt such heat in his body that he needed no warm clothing in winter. Towards the end of the conversation it entered my mind to take the following tack: I began to ask the monk, as a faster and ascetic, to try the method taught by the Holy Fathers, whereby the mind during prayer becomes free from every kind of fantasy, becomes entirely absorbed in attentiveness to the words of the prayer, is confined and held, as *St. John of the Ladder* expresses it (Step 28:17), in the words of the prayer, while at the same time the heart usually expresses its accord with the mind by means of the soul-saving feeling of sorrow for sins, as *St. Mark the Ascetic* said: "When the mind prays without distraction, the heart is contrite: *A contrite and humbled heart God will not despise*" (226 Texts, Para. 34; *Philokalia*, Vol. 1). "When you have tried this for yourself," I told the monk, "inform me of the result of your experience, because it would be awkward for me, with the distracted life I lead, to undertake such an experiment."

"The monk agreed. In a few days he came to me and said: 'What have you done to me!' 'What is wrong?' 'Well, when I tried to pray with attentiveness, confining the mind in the words of the prayer, all my visions disappeared, and I can't get them back any more.' Conversing



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further with the monk, I did not see that boldness and self-reliance which were noticeable in him during our first meeting and which are usually to be noted in people who are in a state of self-deception, supposing themselves to be holy or to be progressing spiritually. The monk expressed a desire to hear my poor advice. When I advised him not to distinguish himself in appearance from others, since that leads to self-conceit, he took his chains off and handed them to me. In a month he came to me again and said that the heat in his body had ceased, that he was already needing warm clothing, and that he slept a great deal more. At the same time he said that on Mt. Athos many, even among those enjoying a reputation of holiness, use the method of prayer which he had used, and teach it to others as well" (Bp. Ignaty).

*Editor's note: The example of prelest cited above, taken from the monastic life, should not lead one to suppose that it is a danger only to monks and ascetics: it has a powerful influence as well at very elementary levels of the spiritual life.*

*In the additional selection below from the same essay, Bp. Ignaty describes the deceptiveness of the IMITATION OF CHRIST by Thomas a Kempis, a Catholic religious manual still very popular in the West, although now considered "old-fashioned" by Catholic modernists who have advanced to other forms of prelest.*

"There reigns in this book and breathes from its pages the unction of the evil spirit, flattering the reader, intoxicating him with the poison of untruth... The book conducts the reader directly to communion with God, without previous purification by repentance; that is why it finds a special sympathy among passionate people, those unacquainted with the path of repentance, not preserved from self-deception and prelest, not set on a proper foundation by the teaching of the Holy Fathers of the Orthodox Church. The book produces a strong effect on the blood and nerves, excites them, which is why it is especially pleasing to people enslaved by sensuality: with this book they can enjoy themselves without renouncing the delights of sensuality. Self-conceit, refined sensuality, and vanity are set forth by the book in place of the action of Divine grace... From it carnal people enter into rapture from a delight and intoxication attained without crucifixion of the flesh with its passions and desires, with flattery of their fallen state."

## ORTHODOXY IN THE CONTEMPORARY WORLD

### UNDERGROUND RELIGIOUS LIFE IN THE USSR

#### 1. THE BROTHERHOOD OF ORTHODOX YOUTH

*The following text, part of a leaflet distributed in Leningrad at the end of 1964 and received by Archbp. Anthony of Geneva (Russian Church Outside of Russia), is one of many contemporary evidences of underground religious activity in the USSR. The original was printed on rough wrapping-type paper with rubber stamps. (Translated from Rossiya, New York, July 16, 1965.)*

THE BROTHERHOOD OF ORTHODOX YOUTH -- is a movement of the sons and daughters of the Orthodox Church. Without making any attempt against the canonical authority of the hierarchs, the Brotherhood nonetheless considers that a clergy that is controlled by the God-hating power is deprived, by the existing tyrannical legislation, of the possibility of following the commandments of Christ Himself -- of preaching the Gospel to all creatures -- of educating young people, of giving organized help to those in need, of answering the slanders of enemies.

Until the clergy become free, we -- the believing youth -- should take these tasks upon ourselves.

Let everyone unite around himself 2 or 3 friends and act without attaching himself either to the Church authority or to us.

Consolidate and weld the solidarity of the whole people by means of real Christian love. Copy and send leaflets

to all who -- have ears to hear. Pray constantly to Christ the Lord that our faith and strength may grow and be fortified. God be with you, friends.

#### 2. PRINTERS AND DISTRIBUTORS OF PRAYERBOOKS AND ICONS ARRESTED

*Rome, Aug. 31, 1965 --*

An Italian correspondent of the newspaper *Il Tempo* informs from Moscow, Aug. 13, that the Moscow militia recently made numerous arrests of persons who had printed prayerbooks and religious literature with a total weight of 450 pounds in a lamp factory at the Institute for Agricultural Research.

This underground publication of religious literature -- as *Moscow Pravda* informs -- began in February in a small printshop in the lamp factory...

The militia arrested a man at the Vnukov airport who was planning to take to Kiev a trunk and bag containing icons printed by a friend of his, who had already been sentenced once for "illegal manufacture and distribution of religious literature."

Orthodox prayer-books, Church calendars, and information on the appearance of the Mother of God at Pochaev<sup>1</sup> were printed at the Institute printshop in the evenings, until the lights in the printshop drew the attention of the Institute's director and a Party secretary.

*Il Tempo* informs that all those who took part in this illegal activity were arrested.

1. See *The Orthodox Word*, No. 3, p. 94.



## IN MEMORIAM

### PROF. I. M. KONTZEVICH

Professor Ivan Michailovich Kontzevich, inspirer, contributor, advisor to *The Orthodox Word* and a fervent reverer of the blessed memory of Father Herman of Alaska, died on July 6, 1965, in Berkeley, California. Our Brotherhood, and indeed the whole of the Orthodox world, lost one of the few last men who was granted to see a living saint and was able to bear witness of it. He saw and became a spiritual son of the holy Startsi Nectary, the last of the great Startsi of Optina (1856-1929). Granted by God to live in the free world, he devoted his life to higher education (he held degrees from Kharkov University, the Imperial Military School, the Sorbonne, the Ecole Supérieure d'Electricité, the St. Sergius Theological Academy in Paris) only to lay a firm ground for his theological writings, in which one primary idea dominated: the acquisition of the Holy Spirit.

In his early, formative years he engrossed himself in the quest for the path to higher, supernatural knowledge and consciousness. He searched for it in Yoga and Buddhism, wandering in the dark. When finally he obtained a book on the Optina Startsi and went to see them, he discovered there the true path to Higher Knowledge — through the attainment of sanctity. This is what he says of himself in his biography of Fr. Nectary:



Prof. Kontzevich as a soldier in his early twenties, at the time when he first discovered Optina Monastery.

"The Monastery and the Startsi left on me an unexpected and irresistible impression which is impossible to express by means of words: it could be understood only through personal experience.

"There in the Monastery one could almost feel the grace of God, the holiness of the place, the close presence of God. This feeling evoked a deep sense of reverence and responsibility for one's every thought, every word and deed; a fear of making a mistake, of falling into prelest, a fear of any kind of self-confidence, spiritual deviation, or 'fancy.'

"This kind of state one could call 'walking before God.'

"There for the first time the spiritual world was disclosed to me, and as an antithesis I was shown the 'Satanic abyss.'

"There I was born spiritually."

## IN MEMORIAM

His genuine understanding of true Orthodox spirituality is reflected in all of his writings, which, unfortunately, are only a meagre portion of what he could have left to enrich our lives. Even his major work, *The Acquisition of the Holy Spirit in Ancient Russia*, has its second volume still unpublished.

Nevertheless, a young God-seeker acquainting himself with what Prof. Kontzevich had to say will bless the day he

was born, for he will have an access to heaven. The Brotherhood of Father Herman, deeply mourning Prof. Kontzevich's departure, hopes gradually, God willing, to publish his writings, including many of those hitherto unpublished, in *The Orthodox Word* for the good of the Church and the glory of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Gleb Podmosensky.

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